

FEDERATION OF FLY FISHERS

Conserving — Restoring — Educating Through Fly Fishing

Steelhead Committee
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March 23, 2000

Federal Caucus
c/o Bonneville Power Administration
707 West Main St., Suite 500
Spokane, WA 99201

Dear Caucus Members:

The Steelhead Committee represents the 10,000 member Federation of Fly Fishers, over 1,000 of whom live in Idaho, Oregon, and Washington, on the conservation of Pacific sea-run salmonids. We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the AII-H Conceptual Recovery Plan and the seven alternatives for listed Snake River salmon and steelhead.

We endorse Alternative #3 in its entirety, including breaching the four lower Snake River dams, conservation fishery management, redirection of hatchery programs from mitigation to conservation of wild stocks, and increased Federal regulation under the Endangered Species Act and the Clean Water Act.

Although there is no single silver bullet for recovery, and all four H's will need to be addressed, the linchpin for recovery of the four listed Snake River runs is breaching the four dams. It is by far the single most important step that can be taken, the one step that must be included to hold any promise of preventing further extinctions and recovering the listed runs. Since almost the time that the last of the dams was completed, the agencies responsible have been nibbling at the edges of the primary problem by making minor adjustments to the hydro regime, stocking huge numbers of cookie cutter hatchery fish, and barging smolts downstream past the dams. None of these actions, separately or in total, has brought the numbers of returning wild adults of any of these runs even close to the levels required to stop the declines and begin, let alone sustain, recovery.



The first step in clarifying the dam breaching decision process is to recognize that there are at least two sets of issues involved, and they need to be separated. The first is the ecological and biological science related to recovery of the listed fish. The second is the various costs and benefits of the dams.

There should no longer be any serious debate about the science. Every well grounded scientific study has agreed that the dams "harass, harm, wound, kill, and trap" large numbers of the four listed Snake River salmon and steelhead. There is a scientific consensus that the single most important step for recovery is breaching the four dams. For example, the Oregon chapter of the American Fisheries Society recently voted 103 to zero in support of the breaching alternative. Everyone of any consequence who knows what the fish need (the scientists) and everyone who cares about the fish agrees on this point. For further scientific support, see the National Research Council "Upstream" report of 1995, the Independent Scientific Advisory Board to the Northwest Power Planning Council "Return to the River" report of 1996, and the recent PATH science. Only those with economic axes to grind defend the hydro system status quo by bringing up bogus science claiming that the dams are not a problem. Yet NMFS, the supposed governmental guardian of the fish, seems to be in the process of declining to name its preferred alternative for recovery.

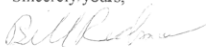
Once the region gets past the science, a serious discussion can be held on the economic benefits of the dams for power, irrigation, and transportation; possible mitigation for losses in these areas; and the economic and other benefits of recovery fueled by breaching. The benefits of recovery must include: (1) meeting the requirements of the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Water Act, and the Northwest Power Act; (2) recovering the large value of the sport and commercial fishing industries; (3) meeting our treaty obligations to the tribes; and (4) simply knowing that the salmon and steelhead are there, which, according to various polls, a majority of the people of the Northwest want.

The Snake River presents a unique set of circumstances in salmon recovery. All four of its salmon and steelhead ESU's are listed, in spite of the basin containing the largest amount of high quality wilderness habitat for spawning and rearing in the lower 48 states. This is because the cumulative

impact of the eight dams between Lewiston and salt water, on both downstream and upstream migration, is enormous. To breach four of the dams will make much better use of the available habitat and increase the chances for recovery dramatically.

Time is of the essence. The dams are there for relatively short term economic reasons. ~~Extinction~~ *is forever.*

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Bill Redman".

Bill Redman, Chair
Steelhead Committee